

INFORMATION - ~~TOP SECRET~~

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DATE 06-12-2013
BY: J76J18T80

cc: The Director
Mr. Ladd

December 9, 1952

VIA REGISTERED MAIL

Honorable Herbert Brownell, Jr.
140 East 19th Street
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Brownell:

Over a period of years a recurrent problem in the Executive Branch of the Government has been the leakage of classified information to newspaper sources. In this connection, I am enclosing a memorandum briefly summarizing some of the problems with which we have been confronted. It appears to me that all too frequently an effort has been made to solve this problem by requesting investigations rather than correcting the situation by tightening up on security at the source.

With best wishes and kind regards,

Sincerely yours,

J. Edgar Hoover

Enclosure

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December 8, 1952

RE: ~~LEAKAGE OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION~~
THROUGH NEWSPAPER COLUMNISTS

Since 1950, several government agencies and establishments have brought to our attention numerous articles which have appeared in newspapers and magazines disclosing classified government information. Many of the articles were written by well-known columnists and have pointed to the fact that their sources are exceptionally well informed on important and current government matters.

Investigations were instituted at the request of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice and all leads were vigorously pursued for the purpose of ascertaining the person, or persons, in the government responsible for divulging classified information to the authors of the articles. However, as these investigations and inquiries progressed they soon pointed to the futility of conducting investigations into matters involving the release of classified information by unauthorized persons, including newspapermen and columnists, because of the wide dissemination given government documents in general, the great number of government officials and employees having access to these classified documents, and the lax security on the part of many government agencies in the handling of classified government documents.

Drew Pearson has published in his various columns of "The Washington Merry Go-round" appearing in the Washington Post, several items of "~~Top Secret~~" classification. He has disclosed classified military information pertaining to the Chinese Communists' and the United Nations' manpower in Korea which information was based on "~~secret~~" telecon messages between the Far Eastern Command in Japan and the Pentagon. He has published information out of a "~~secret~~" report of the National Security Council, urging that we get out of Korea altogether. He was able to obtain and publish, discussions of "~~Top Secret~~" matters held at a White House conference on December 10, 1951.

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Joseph and Stewart Alsop, columnists and authors of the column entitled "Matter of Fact" appearing in the "Washington Post" have also published, on several occasions, classified government information pertaining to the Hydrogen Bomb and other matters. Their published information indicated that it came from authoritative sources due to its accuracy. Also, [redacted] b6 b7C
[redacted] Hanson W. Baldwin, writers for the "New York Times," have been the authors of articles containing classified government information.

The magazine "Aviation Week" published by the McGraw Hill Publishing Company, Inc., New York City, and the magazine "Newsweek" published by Newsweek, New York City, have also published similar classified government information pertaining to our national defense.

In all our inquiries and investigations we have not been able to pinpoint the person, or persons, responsible for the unauthorized disclosures. The reason we have not been able to do so is due to the wide dissemination given classified government documents, resulting in innumerable government officials and employees having access to the information, and the apparent weakness in maintaining adequate records concerning classified documents.

In one particular case, an Assistant Director for classification and security at a scientific laboratory of the Atomic Energy Commission, estimated that pertinent information published by the Alsop brothers was known to about 1,000 persons at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory and between 2,000 and 10,000 other persons in other agencies involved in national defense.

Inquiries in another case, revealed that an undetermined number of copies of the pertinent documents were prepared and disseminated, that unauthorized persons received copies of the documents, and that the documents were left on a table, unguarded, for anyone to take.

In a case concerning the disclosure of information pertaining to an atomic "penetration" bomb, the Atomic Energy Commission advised that to identify all documents in which information appeared concerning the "penetration" bomb would be an endless task, and that an investigation to determine who had access or possible access to memoranda and documents in which the "penetration" bomb was mentioned would not be feasible.

(U) Our inquiries into recent press releases relative to the detonation of a Hydrogen Bomb at the Pacific Proving Ground at Eniwetok, revealed that although approximately 11,000 persons were involved in the test and approximately 8,000 were actual participants in the test, little attempt was made to maintain its security. Censorship of mail was not established, and, according to a United States seaman who authored a letter describing the results of the detonation, which letter appeared in a newspaper in Tennessee, no security instructions were furnished the crew of his particular ship prior to the test. X

Investigations conducted in eleven cases involving the unauthorized release of classified government information published by columnists in newspapers and appearing in magazines, has cost an estimated \$84,560.31 and nine hundred and two agent man days have been utilized in attempting to run down the source or sources of the disclosures without affirmative results.

Our recent investigations only substantiated that the remedy lies within the various government agencies themselves.

There must be fixed responsibility in determining to what extent dissemination should be given to government documents and thereafter, appropriate records maintained as to dissemination, together with provisions for their future release and summarization by government agencies. It would appear that if responsibility was firmly fixed upon officials of the various agencies in the government and they were personally held accountable for any leaking of information under their control, that unauthorized disclosures would soon cease.

Our investigations in matters of this type during the recent years have been inconclusive as to the results, and this has been primarily due to the great number of persons having access to the information prior to its publication by newspapermen. Such investigations cannot, by their very nature, be restricted to inquiries among a few persons. Generally they extend to inquiries within many agencies, due to the dissemination given the documents, resulting in our inquiries becoming general knowledge. They prompt inquiries from journalists who are prone to direct criticism at the Department and the 'SI' for attempting to interfere in the relationship between the journalist and his news sources, which over the years the press has come to consider as highly confidential and privileged.

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Our investigations of cases of this type have not apparently been influential in reducing the number of leaks in our government agencies but appear to be a means to an end, used by government officials to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. A general tightening up of security regulations in various government agencies would prevent such unauthorized disclosures, thereby assuring for the government a greater degree of security for its official documents.

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